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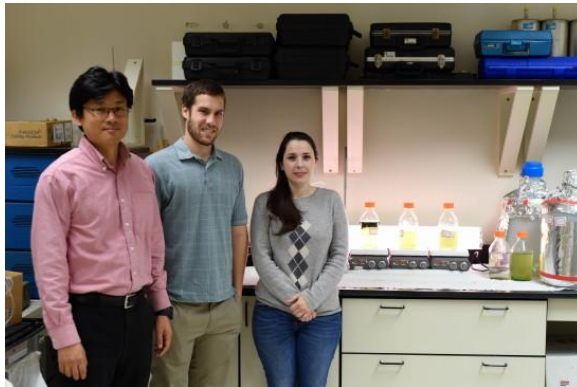
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UCF Students Make School History -- Win EPA Grant for Sustainability Project



By Aileen Perilla

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has selected a UCF team to receive a P3 Award – a first in UCF history.

The P3 Award recognizes student projects that benefit people, promote prosperity and protect the planet by designing environmental solutions that move the nation toward a sustainable future.

UCF's winning project, led by faculty mentor Woo Hyoung Lee, an assistant professor in the Department of Civil, Environmental and Construction Engineering, focuses on finding ways to make algae biofuel easier and less expensive to produce.

"The big-picture goal of the project is to help make algae-based biofuels cheaper and more sustainable, so they can eventually compete with traditional fossil fuels, as well as current biofuels, like corn and other crops, that take up usable farmland and cause their own environmental problems," said Nicolas Maier, one of the students on the winning team.

Currently the process to turn algae into fuel is difficult, costly and not efficient enough to make it cost-effective, team members said.

Others on the team include undergraduate students Rebecca McLean and Matthew Rudolph and Ph.D. students Jared Church and Faris Munshi. This group of students is hoping to harness the energy of algae and provide a cost-effective alternative biofuel by using a method of forward osmosis to separate algae from waste water.

The project has potential, Lee said.

By Aileen Perilla

Wednesday, December 23, 2015

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“If NASA decided, they could use this technology to treat the wastewater in the international space station using algae,” Lee said.

The team qualified for this round of the competition last spring when it competed and earned \$15,000 to further develop its plan.

Jared Church, who is pursuing a doctorate in environmental engineering, said he’s thrilled to be on a team that’s creative and producing a solution to a real-world problem.

“Separately these technologies have existed and have been used for quite a while,” Church said about some of the components in the project. “Recently there has been a much higher need for a domestic oil source. So there has been a lot of research heading toward this algae biofuel area, and here we have the opportunity to combine these two older technologies into this new technology to help reduce the cost of biofuel production. It was exciting to see that the technologies existed, and that we provided a new angle and put those pieces together.”

The next step for the team comes in April 2016 when it will take its design to the National Sustainable Design Expo to compete for a \$75,000 grant.

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